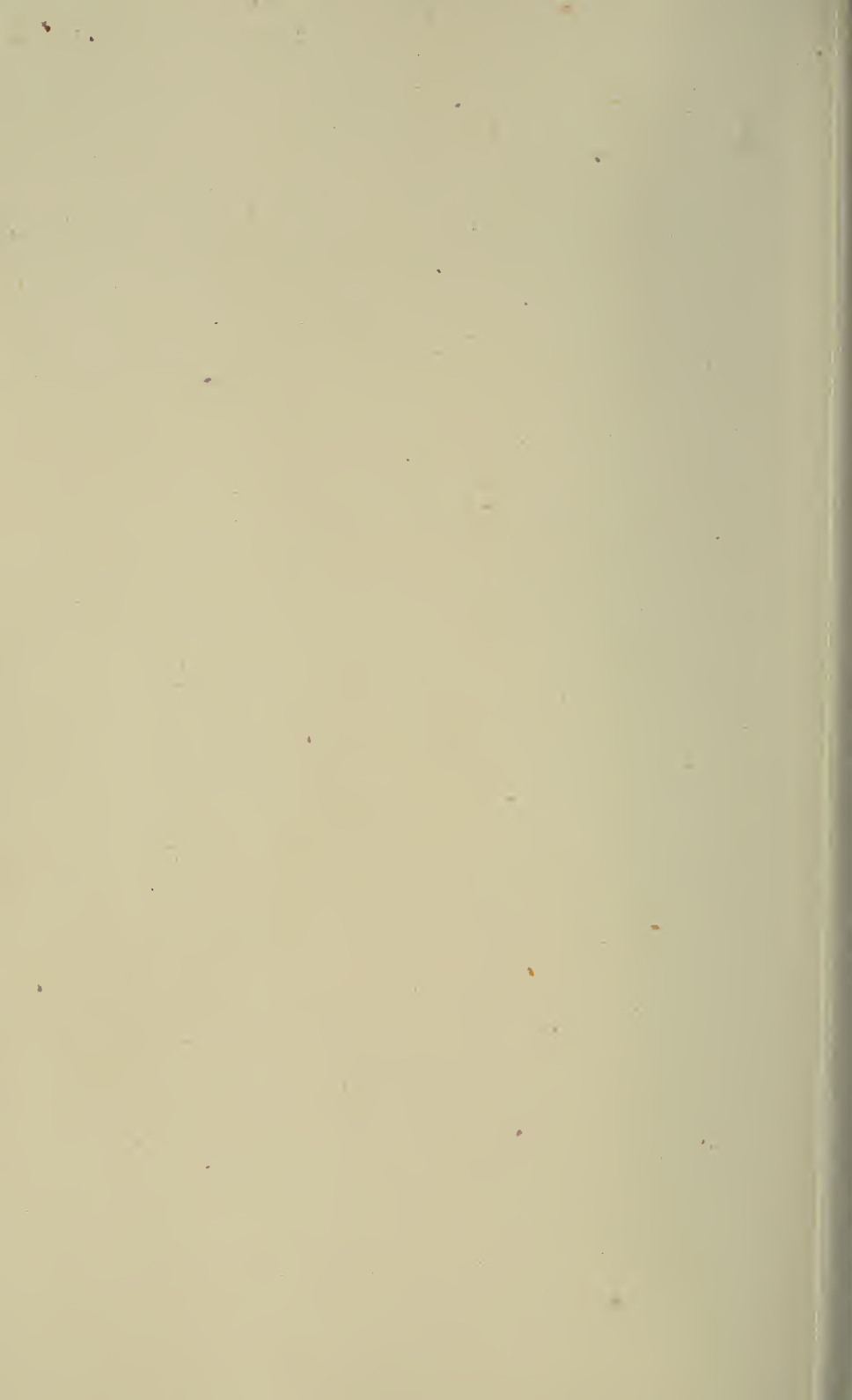


# i magazine

*a Literary Arts Journal*



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# *i magazine*

a literary arts journal  
spring 2009

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is a student publication of  
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# *i magazine*

editorial staff

Tracy Ulrich

cover layout

Robert Barboza

front and back cover art

Joseph Benavidez

faculty advisor

Michelle Valois

special people who deserve thanks

Student Government Association,

Sonja Sheldon,

Computer Graphic Design Department,

Sandy Arsenault, and Greg Clement

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***i magazine* is a student publication, but we often feature guest writers who are not currently MWCC students. In this issue we are proud to present work by two guest poets: David Wyman, Professor of English at MWCC and Laurie Beland, an MWCC alumna.**



## **NOTES TO MY DAUGHTER**

---

**David Wyman**

At night, I'm too easily convinced that my freedom  
Shines like a newly minted coin  
Till these beliefs fly off on rented astral wings—

In reality I'm still on some windy back road, going up  
Or north under a desert sky  
That I continually read as blank—

Yet even then, their soaring shadows go on turning  
And turning on the high cliffs  
And on the rocks below, smearing the surface

As I hear myself speak in another room.  
The light from our stars emanates  
From an ancient universe, so all that I've collected,

These rare coins, are for your future,  
A squall of possibilities  
To someone now only nineteen inches long...

Sit in the shadow of a coconut palm and sleep for an hour.  
The day is yours and the past,  
A shifting mirage, falling like April snow.

## OWLING

---

David Wyman

'When you go owling, you don't need words,' says  
The little girl in *Owl Moon*. She has a pink scarf  
And a red coat, just like yours. And she's out in the woods  
With her dad. Coincidentally, the weekend report  
From Nantucket includes one long-eared owl

And, for the moment, we wish we lived near the ocean  
But in winter, when the waves are perilous  
And the stoic shades of winter's blues and browns  
Leave us unable to predict even the simplest event,  
Never mind the weather. All this white space,

Meaningful as it may be, is just a lot of dark matter—  
To us anyway. So we choose to block it out.  
Like background noise, till that too becomes a habit.  
And we miss out on other opportunities, grander schemes.  
Our footsteps crunching the hard-crusting snow,

It's like we said, we always seem to be riding over  
The tops of things, yet the title means something to us,  
Or we knew what it meant at the start—this [frozen]  
'fountainhead / from within you, moving out,'  
As Rumi calls it, in one of his poetical improvisations.

## ***THE SIX OF CUPS***

---

**David Wyman**

A card of the past:  
Children in an old garden, their cups  
Filled with flowers,  
    things that have vanished.

And only the sound, a low  
    rumbling that seems  
To have no source except perhaps  
    for the trees  
Surrounding the clear lake.

Another reading reverses this.  
It also describes  
An orbit. This is another way.

A shiny penny tossed  
    into a fountain, or well, signs  
Filling the space indicating  
Where you or I might be

As I'm looking down at your  
    feet—stuck there  
The desire to run away yoked  
To the brand of shoes you run  
    away in...And yet, we stay

Thinking of loud places that  
    change as we remember them,  
Happy as the marsh wren  
That likes to nest in cattails but  
    not in loosestrife.

# ***MY HOUSE BOAT HEART***

---

**Laurie Beland**

Would the house  
of my heart  
cave in or shatter  
like glass  
without beams  
of our arms and legs?  
Would the window  
of our eyes  
have no depth  
or insight  
about a clear thought  
or a sunny day?

A forcefield of gravity  
holding the earth  
in its center  
the middle  
in ever-changing  
invisible forgetability  
like a chunk of nothing  
filled with something  
our walls  
incomprehensible protection  
to wind and weather.

Yet, a door, an odor  
that opens the senses  
aromatherapy

Welcome to the Heart House Boat  
on the stellar ocean of love.

## **WITHOUT YOU**

---

**Laurie Beland**

We skim across  
a frozen lake  
scraping  
heart-shapes  
into the ice

Please,  
dig deep  
into the  
springtime  
of my love

Without you  
a portion  
of my heart  
would sever  
and drift off  
to sea  
like an iceberg

## ***DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL***

---

**Laurie Beland**

Daddy  
knows you're  
maturing  
He's getting  
scared  
Mama bought  
a training bra  
yesterday  
I'm not allowed  
to wear make-up  
The childhood  
tomboy is  
waving by  
Daddy's pulling  
down the drive-way  
He wants to play  
some baseball  
but I want  
to look in the mirror  
Daddy's crying  
all the boys  
are waiting  
Daddy's gonna get  
A gun.

## EGOCENTRISM AND ROBOTICS

---

Ian Roberts

“How’s it going?”—“*How’s it going?*”

Pleasantries are as dead as disco.

Chicken nugget value meal at the driver side table.

Fire engine red sports cars and one night stands.

“How’s it going?”—“*How’s it going?*”

Nobody has time to improvise.

Door open, people hustle by.

The wind off of their shoulders is frigid.

Chivalry is dead and so is Thank you.

Marriages are short, but divorces are shorter.

Nobody takes time to get to know each other.

No crying in baseball, try no crying.

Survival of the fittest,

Tears fear jagged teeth.

Life is short.

Predatory mortgages and ponzi schemes—me, me, me.

Altruism is laughable.

Egocentrism and robotics.

## ***OUTBURST***

---

**Ian Roberts**

Anger is like a balloon. Red, elastic and part of a bunch.  
Every hot breath is bottled. A culmination of all  
the breaths before, stretching the skin taut. A flinch,  
never knowing when one more breath  
is the one that will make it  
Explode. A wife making up her face and not her mind.  
Years of hot air coming out all at once.  
The nipple unable to control the flow.  
Surface soft on the eye, but hard to the touch.  
A husband with broad shoulders.  
They float among us batted to and fro.



## ***SOME SONGS***

---

**Hannah Peckham**

some songs. they just make my eyes want to  
fall out of my head,  
or make me cry my heart out into the ground a quilt my  
pillow someone's t-shirt.  
some songs just make me want to melt into the ground like  
some sad rain.  
I get the chills like the sky is crying,  
letting its cold tears splash down on my bare arms, on my  
cheeks.  
the water following the lines of my face and finding its way to  
my mouth.  
I can taste the salt of the rain, as if those were my own tears I  
let  
fall, or slip down my neck and into the collar of my shirt. or  
wiped away,  
dropped down from my wrist to  
my hand to  
the ground where the world begins and I can be reborn.  
some songs make me want to live my life over again like I  
was that rain.  
sink back into the ground on that night during the summer  
when I laid under the stars  
and felt that same cold. shivering with the simple pleasure  
of being alive, and smiling beneath the sky.

## **REMEMBERED**

---

### **Hannah Peckham**

I don't want to write letters to my great grandmother in the nursing home. It takes too much out of me to think of her in her chair all day, feeling for her chocolates, on the laminate wood table that rolls away when she reaches for them.

The nurses that come and go.

Every time I see them I wonder how they can do their jobs. I think of the families that survive off their paychecks as mouthwipers, juicepourers. Purpose-givers. Daymakers.

Their families that live off Kraft singles cheese slices the color of an old reference book at the library about the Spanish inquisition, the one I pressed a flower in hoping that someday I would be remembered.

And white bread like tissues.

The kind of food my great grandmother used once, the time I stayed with her, to make me a grilled cheese sandwich. And I remember how she left a little of the plastic on the cheese. I could see the shiny, ric-rac edges sticking out between the crusts of bread on my plate. That was when I first started wondering, if Nana was okay.

## **CARS**

---

### **Hannah Peckham**

untitled

Went for a walk this morning.

Saw a car accident but just walked by.

"Oh my God."

The lady kept saying it, she wouldn't stop.

Everyone stopped and stared.

"Oh my God."

the villains

Driving to school I was behind this red car with four exhaust pipes. A tall old man was driving, with his little curly-haired wife's head just popping out from the seat beside him. I was listening to some Bach Fugue, in C minor. Like I was on this epic James Bond chase to catch that red car, except it was going thirty-five. I pretended like I was all hot and bothered at the difficulties of catching the villains. Then they took a left, and rolled into the baby sunlight of an autumn morning. Old people aren't villains.

the cat

Driving to school today I saw a frozen cat lying by the side of the road. And now I'm wondering what he was sneaking about trying to find when he was side-winded by a car and all of the sudden the trail just stopped. I wonder whether he had his life all figured out by now. He looked like a doll, just laying there like the toy Simba my best friend gives me to sleep with when I spend the night, not sleeping. His golden-orange limbs extending from him like those of an overturned kitchen table when someone gets mad. The cat's hair was glimmering, with tiny crystals of ice, in the

sunlight. And I wondered then whether he was thawing out, his organs warming again as if they were about to pulse life through him. Poor Cat. We are all that way. Spending our thoughts on this and going there and coming back and giving love and wanting it back and then getting side-winded by a car, only to hope all our cautious steps were worth it.

roadkill

What's with all the roadkill?

I mean, seriously.

What a way to go.

Fur and guts splattered on the pavement

Your legacy ground into the asphalt

and some of you carried away to the ends of the earth  
on someone's tires.

What a great way to travel.

If you can't handle the heat

throw yourself in front of a semi-trailer.

## **TOPLESS**

---

**Ashley Gough**

5:30. Shit, she's going to be here soon, I thought to myself. I frantically pushed garment after garment aside in my closet, rejecting each one while cursing myself for being so boring. I made a mental note to burn all the beige in my life, if I lived through the night that is.

5:45. I was starting to panic. If I didn't have a sufficiently slutty ensemble picked out by the time Janet arrived I was sure she was going to force me into something she no doubt will have brought with her. I didn't even want to imagine what nightmare she might pull out of her bag, but it was a pretty safe bet that whatever it was would involve some kind of animal print, or worse – pleather.

With that image I got an idea. I might not have any sex-kitten porn star clothes, but I did have a relatively tight pencil skirt and a black suede button-down blazer that could double as a shirt. The sexy librarian look never went out of style, right? Well it was going to have to do. At least I'd bought a trashy black push-up bra out of spite right after my divorce. It hiked the girls clear up to my eyebrows and the lace peaked out of the blazer just enough to make it clear to whoever was looking that I was definitely asking for it. Whatever "it" was, I still wasn't sure.

I was barely finished with the last button on my blazer when my bedroom door flew open. Standing in the space between the pale green walls of my bedroom was a brilliant gash of bright red chiffon. Janet covered her eyes with one hand, and the other held a bottle of cabernet. Her long dress flowed down her 5'11" slender frame and met four inch black patent leather stilettos. While I've known other tall women to be far too self-conscious about their height to wear anything but flats, Janet loved to get as high up as possible. She said she felt like her height made her unique, but I think

she just enjoyed the intimidation she could evoke by towering over people, especially men.

"Alice," she called out dramatically. "I seriously hope for your sake that you have followed my orders, because I came armed with back up." It was then that I saw the violent purple material creeping out the edge of the bag that swung from her shoulder. Oh no.

Her instructions had been short but clear. "Dress like the sleaziest, skankiest hoe you can picture. Leave the rest to me and don't ask any questions." Janet had promised me a night I would never forget and, although I was scared out of my mind, I had agreed to go along with it. She had come up with this plan, whatever it was, directly after a small but significant break down I'd had, during which I'd begged her to help me to break out of my funk and force me to enjoy life. She'd always had good timing.

Janet flung her hand away from her eyes and into the air like she was expecting a new Mercedes with a big red bow on top to be parked on my bedroom floor. I flipped my hands out to my sides as if to say *Tada* and then rolled my eyes, waiting for her verdict. Her eyes combed over me, her face not disapproving but contemplative.

"Okay. I get it," she said nodding. I imagined she was debating with herself over my decision to go with classy-slutty, rather than hooker-slutty. Then her head snapped up and the look in eyes told me she'd just been struck with a stroke of genius, at least in her mind. "Here!" she practically screamed at me, kicking off her shoes. "Put these on!"

I stepped into the shiny patent leather spiked pumps. It took me a minute to find my balance and then I reposed for a second review. Janet briefly examined me and then proudly sighed, "Perfect."

"Perfect for what, Janet?" I asked, shoving my hands on my hips, trying not to fall over. "Tell me what we're doing." I was beginning to panic at the thought of possibly going dancing in these shoes.



“Ah, ah, ah... Not quite yet. First, drinks!” She lifted the bottle of wine triumphantly into the air. “Where are the glasses?”

“On the dresser,” I said, waving a hand at them as I sat on the bed. I was already feeling the effects of the shoes. No way was I wearing these out. I would have to draw the line somewhere. Janet had been my best friend for 20 years, ever since we’d shared a dorm in college. It had taken just about that long for me to learn to stand up to her insistent ways. I still only picked my battles when it came to her. Janet was over the top, dramatic, demanding, and pushy. But that’s what I loved about her so much. She was the complete opposite of me, and often she was everything I’d always wanted to be. In fact, there were many times that I’d called on her to fight my battles for me when I just couldn’t be assertive enough. I envied her ability to always say exactly what she wanted, not taking crap from anybody. I’d always been the type to be more concerned with hurting somebody’s feelings than defending my own.

“Where are the girls?” She asked, handing me a very full glass.

“With Jeff,” I replied after a long sip. “I told him I had a date.” I smirked and Janet laughed out loud. I figured the dig to my newly ex husband would make her proud. Unless... “Do I have a date?” I asked, raising a suspicious eyebrow.

“Don’t guess darling. It will take the fun out of it. Besides, you’d never get it right.” I sighed, a little relieved, but only just a little.

“So when do I get to find out your plan for me?”

“As soon as you are drunk enough to agree to it,” she said matter-of-factly. I rolled my eyes and kept drinking. She broke into a dramatic monologue about her day. She worked as a graphic designer for a trendy art magazine downtown. As always, everyone was clueless to her brilliance as an artist and if it weren’t for her love affair with

Coach handbags, she would leave them high and dry to go back to her painting.

It didn't take long for the warming effect of the wine to set in. I was making a dent in my second over-sized glass and I hadn't eaten all day, nervous about the mystery plans for tonight. As Janet babbled on, I began to mentally guess again. Surely if we were going to a bar, it wouldn't require my being trashed beforehand. Maybe she had invited a stripper over like she had at my bachelorette party. Then my stomach dropped. She'd joked a few weeks back about "getting me back in the saddle." I hadn't been with anybody since my divorce. She felt like six months was more than enough time to move on and maybe her interpretation of my plea for her to help me get a life was really a plea to help get me laid. How did she put it? Even if she had to *pay* for it herself. My face turned bright red as I dared to consider it. An escort? Had she bought me an escort? Was I *that* desperate that she thought I needed a hooker?

My eyes closed and I swayed a little bit. "Well, I guess you're ready for the big reveal," she said as she set her glass down. Her face was beaming and I could tell that whatever was about to happen was going to be terrifying. I watched her carefully as she crossed the room and picked up the bag she'd had draped over her shoulder before. "Now, remember. You agreed to this. Whatever I say, right? And keep in mind that I'm your best friend. I love you and I know what's good for you. You're going to thank me for this eventually."

My heart began to pound as she reached into her bag. Then, pulling her hand out ceremoniously, she revealed to me an old Polaroid camera. One of my eyebrows shot up suspiciously, but mostly I was just confused. "I don't get it," I conceded.

She laughed her grand laugh again. I could tell she was having the time of her life. "Alice, we're about to ruin your chances of ever becoming President."



“Huh?” I was completely lost. Nothing was clicking.

Janet sighed, losing patience. She held the camera up to her eye and clicked the button. For some reason it reminded me of a gunshot and I flinched. “We’re going to be having a photo shoot honey.”

Nothing.

“A dirty one.”

Still nothing.

“Of you... naked.” Oh shit.

I stood up, panicked. “What? Why?!” I demanded. I backed away almost defensively. Maybe I didn’t understand her correctly. Did she just say naked?? “What the hell are you thinking, Janet?”

“Relax babe. It isn’t that big of a deal.” She sat down and sipped her wine. I was beginning to get furious now. How could she possibly think I’d go along with *this*? Did she know me at all?

“And what could possibly be the point? What were you intending to do with the pictures once you took them?” I was pacing, in front of her, too upset to care that my feet were wobbling ridiculously with every step.

“They’re yours, obviously,” she said rolling her eyes. Then, as if afraid to say it, she added, “for you to keep, just for you. So you’ll always *have* them.” Her voice was soft now, almost comforting. This stopped me in my tracks. Understanding finally pierced through me like a sharp blade, gutting me.

Janet was the only person I’d told about being diagnosed with breast cancer, and we never *really* talked about it.

I sank into the chair that sat against the wall opposite my bed. A voice in the back of my mind was telling me that I’d stopped breathing, but I wasn’t paying attention to it. I hated this, the way I would somehow forget for a few minutes, maybe a few hours. No, forget was the wrong word. It might be more accurate to say that I would get distracted

enough so that it wasn't at the forefront of my mind. In fact, I was secretly hoping that maybe tonight I would be spared from having to think about it at all. But here it was. And it pissed me off that it had snuck up on me, again.

"You asked me to help you," she said softly.

"I didn't ask for this!" My words came out more viciously than I had expected, and suddenly I realized I wasn't talking about the photo shoot.

Janet rose from the bed and put her wine glass on the bedside table. Then, like an elegant giant reaching for a diminutive pebble, she knelt in front of me, placing her beautiful hands on my knees.

"I know you don't think you're strong enough for this," she said as I stared at the gaudy emerald ring on her little finger. "But that's bullshit."

I looked at her then and saw the comforting wisdom I'd seen the day I told her. It was a kind wisdom that she rarely showed. She was my friend and my warrior in both those moments.

"I'm scared," I said finally. I felt stinging warmth invade my eyes and I quickly blinked it away.

"Well of course you are," she said, thrusting herself to her feet. I knew the sensitive moment had passed as I watched her cross the room seemingly in one swift step. She paused to examine her lipstick in the dresser mirror before adding, "It's cancer."

"What if I die?" I whispered to my hands.

She brought my glass back to me. "Well then you die," she said abruptly.

I scoffed at her for a moment, but then suddenly I realized she was right. Death was about as unarguable a matter there was. All of a sudden, a guttural laugh spewed out of me like a fountain. It was uncontrollable. The tears poured down my face and I desperately tried to control myself, but it just felt so good that I couldn't stop. When I finally was able to catch my breath, I took another sip of wine

hoping the awful feelings wouldn't creep back in and spoil my high.

Janet smiled at me coyly. "Besides, that isn't what's bothering you. I'm no fool, Miss Alice." I looked at her, confused for a moment, before she continued. "It's your tits you're worried about. You don't want them cut off. And it's understandable, they're great tits."

I laughed again, because the only other alternative was falling into a black hole of anger and fear. I decided then that tonight would not be about that. I would follow Janet's lead. I would talk about this honestly, but I wouldn't mope. I finished off the glass and then crossed the room to refill it. Clearly we weren't going anywhere so why not get plastered?

"No. The truth is," I started, slopping a little wine onto the dresser, "I'm just pissed off. I mean, I'm 38. Aren't I too young for this?" I sat on the bed and Janet sat next to me. "I wasn't supposed to go through this until I was old and wrinkled, and well, done using them!" I giggled.

"Aha!" she cried. "I told you this was about losing the girls. *What if I die?*" she mocked, elbowing me in the ribs.

We were looking at each other in the mirror for a moment, and then a flash of purple caught my attention. I reached behind me and grabbed the bag Janet had brought in with her.

"I have to know," I said. "What hideous –"

"Hey!"

"I mean, what aesthetically brilliant ensemble you brought for me."

I rummaged through the bag and pulled out a long string of pearls. I smirked and placed them around her neck before returning to my exploring. My jaw dropped as I pulled out a set of hand cuffs. Those I just threw behind me on the bed. Next was the purple material, which turned out to be a long scarf. I felt like I was looking through an S&M version of Mary Poppins' carpet bag.

"Um, there's nothing for me to *wear* in here," I said.

Janet shrugged. "Well, I just figured the clothes were going to come off anyway. So if you didn't have anything suitable on, we were just going to skip the undressing step." I smirked, but then noticed Janet looked dead serious.

"Come on. You don't actually think I'm doing this right?" I tried to laugh, but the look on Janet's face grew even more frightening as she rose ominously from the bed and turned to face me. She crossed her arms and peered down at me sternly.

"Oh, yes you are." Her words had a sense of finality that refused objection. She lifted the camera from the dresser and gestured for me to stand up. Suddenly I realized that this was really about to happen. I swallowed a huge gulp of wine and then placed the glass on the dresser.

Okay, I thought, this is it. Just do it. You'll be fine. Deep breaths. "Where do you want me?"

"Stand in front of the window, next to the chair, and unbutton the jacket." She had the tone of a professional photographer, and her usual artistic glare. I did as she demanded, and even improvised by reaching my hand across the back of the chair. She took a few shots like that, and I did my best to pose for each one. It felt awkward but I had to admit I was having fun.

"Jacket all the way off now," she instructed. I did as I was told and posed for a few more shots. I even started playing with the straps of my bra, trying to be seductive. "When did you get that little number, slut?"

I laughed as I continued to pose, proud of my excessive cleavage. "Right after Jeff moved out." Then something occurred to me. "You know what really makes me mad? These really are great tits," I said, grabbing my own breasts, "and I've wasted them all this time on Jeff. I should have had an affair, given somebody else a chance to appreciate them." Janet doubled over laughing at that before she continued to snap away.



“Okay,” she said, stopping the clicks. I noticed the large pile of Polaroid pictures on the floor in front of her but didn’t dare to look as they developed. “Time to lose the bra.”

I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and unhooked the bra. It hit the ground just as I heard another click. Well here we go, I thought to myself. Suddenly I was very grateful to Janet, for being my friend and for making me do this. I let go. I allowed myself to be silly, to be sexy, to be beautiful.

She snapped away as I fully undressed and continued to pose. Standing up, sitting in the chair, straddling the chair, bending over the chair. My inner porn star emerged and, with the help of the wine, took over. I let go of my inhibitions and my fears completely. That was the first night of my life and I was free.

When the film ran out I threw on a t-shirt and sweatpants. Janet and I laughed for a while longer as we finished off the bottle of wine. We didn’t talk anymore about the cancer that night, but I knew that now I could talk about it and I wouldn’t crack. Maybe that was all I needed.

Janet handed me the pile of my scandalous act and gave me a kiss on my cheek before she left for the night. After one last sip, I gathered the courage to examine them. I flipped through them four times, each time more fascinated with my naked body. I was gorgeous! I placed the pictures in my sock drawer and then looked myself over in the mirror.

I pulled the t-shirt off and stood topless. Images of post-operative scar pamphlets flashed in my mind briefly, but I shook them away. Not tonight, I told myself. Tonight is about me, and I am whole. Right now I am whole. I placed my hands on my breasts, touching them for a moment. Tears began to fall down my face and it surprised me because I hadn’t felt myself well up. My hands moved then across my chest and I grasped my shoulders, pulling myself into a self-comforting hug. I knew then, I would be alright.

## **UNTITLED**

---

### **Joseph Benavidez**

The alarm clock screamed. It was time to wake up, I dreaded this horrible day. I was still alone, while most of my peers had found their bags, and ultimately a better understanding of themselves, I had yet to find mine. I couldn't stay in bed all day. With an extremely high amount of self-will and determination I forced myself out of bed. This would be a long day.

It was.

Once again, the alarm clock screamed. Using the same personal qualities, I crawled out of bed. But today was different, I could feel it. It happened at school. Everyone was just sitting in class, barely listening to the teacher, when Steve randomly found his bag. There it was, under his desk. With the excitement usually found in small children, Steve gasp, "My bag!" And there it was, the final breaking point. My mind ran with thoughts. Why did he get a bag? What was wrong with me? How come I didn't get my bag? Do I even have a bag? I was distraught.

Without a second thought, I quickly jogged out the class. No one noticed, they were giving Steve his kudos. The walk home was unusually long. Instead of the normal twenty-minute walk, it seemed like two hours. All the way home I thought about what had just occurred. Maybe I didn't deserve a bag. I had heard of people who had never found their bag. I had always thought they were urban legends, but what if they were true? How could someone live without their bag? I was terrified.

My walk was over, I had made it home. I steadily made my way towards my room. The final destination being my bed. Today was too hard, I needed to recuperate. Slowly climbing into bed, I felt something odd under the

sheets. Swiftly searching through my bed, I found it. My bag! I had finally found my bag! I scanned the outside. It was full of beautiful pictures, and inspiring quotes. But I quickly opened my bag, to discover the hidden secrets about myself. But all that was inside was a simple toy, a magazine, and nick-knacks. And then I thought the most wonderful idea. What if everything about your bag, was about you? What if your bag didn't complete you, but you completed your bag?

From that day on, I knew my life wouldn't be hard, all I had to do was remember I had a bag, and it had me.

# ***I BELIEVE THAT BEING A COWBOY IS THE BEST JOB I EVER HAD***

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**Luis Orosco**

At the sound of the coffee maker, as usual, I run upstairs to get ready. I wear the usual attire from my profession: pants, shirt and a belt buckle with a leather holster. At the bottom of the stairs the guys of my roundup gang are waiting for me. "Where are your boots Woody?" Taye asks. "Don't forget your boots". He looks at me anxiously while I put my boots on. I get up and stomp the floor a few times to be sure that they are okay. "You need your hat," he says while he runs to the other room looking for my famous cowboy hat. After all, what's a cowboy without his hat? I play along while I pack my lunchbox. One of them pulls my ID badge cord. "Reach for the sky", I scream in a bad impression of a southern accent. Taye holds my hands and drags me to the other room. I can see the joy in his eyes while he says, "You are Woody." We spin and fall flat on the carpet. We roll, bark and laugh. "I'm a little red monkey", Darius says while he jumps onto my back. A couple somersaults and I go back to being Woody. I cannot help looking at the clock. I have to leave in a while. After all, I'm not a cowboy, just a mechanic, but for my guys I'm Woody the cowboy toy.

I still remember how it happened. The boys watched a movie called "Toy Story" about a cowboy toy called Woody and other toys. Taye loved the characters and one day I became his very own "Cowboy Woody". He was thrilled; after all, not every two year old kid has a cowboy as a father. It was a fast transformation: my ugly steel toe boots became cowboy boots, I got a rattle snake belt buckle and a huge ten gallon hat that I balance on my small head.



Sometimes I surprise myself about how goofy I can be, and how embarrassed I would be if somebody caught me pretending to be Woody. But at home, I have no limits. I cannot believe how many hats I've worn since I became a father and how much meaning my life has had since then. Being a father is one of the most challenging and satisfying jobs I've ever had. Though I also take my job as a cowboy very seriously, I have to be ready to say the silly phrases when my cord is pulled, to help them fly when the ejection button is pressed, to give double piggy back rides , or eat noses, ears and play dough cake.

But it is time to leave now, no more cowboys and flying monkeys for today. It is time for my real work. I still can't help but smile when I think of my guys. In a hectic life like mine there is always time for cowboys and pirates.

I have no experience as a cowboy, nor as a father. Sometimes I hear fathers saying that they just do what their father did when they were kids. They also tell stories about things that they've passed through generations. I feel empty handed. All that I got from my father was my last name. Sometimes I wander through flea markets fishing for treasures that I want to pass on. "You don't need that many tools," I usually hear from my wife, or sometimes she just rolls her eyes when I try to explain what it is good for. "It is a guy thing," she usually says to the vendor.

"Are you teaching them Spanish?" people ask. "Teaching Spanish? I have more important things to teach them," I usually answer. The truth is that I have more to learn from them than things to teach them. Sometimes people refer to children as a project: let him play with dolls so he can be sensitive; read to him a lot so he can master English; let him play outside so he can love nature; set play dates so he can be more social.

"Their brains are like sponges," I've heard many times. But who said that I have the right to choose how to

moisten their “sponge”? I believe that they are perfect. They love all until we teach them who not to love. They are social until we teach them not to talk to strangers. They want to learn until we send them to a classroom surrounded by strangers. They love nature until we overwhelm them with toys and electronics. At the age of three how important is the alphabet in their little lives anyway? They don’t want to be lawyers or doctors, they just want to be cowboys and pirates, and they don’t care about Harvard or Yale. They just want to wonder, pretend and be loved. I believe children are born with a gift that gets dull and finally forgotten as we grow up, I believe that as a father it is my job to preserve their gift, and I will do it as Woody the cowboy, as a pirate or as just Luis the mechanic.

# THE TASTE OF DEATH

---

Sean Ryder

*"Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once." Julius Caesar, II.ii.32*

Madness, madness.

We had not long to live.

The storm came upon us suddenly. In the distance, stars began to disappear in the sky as a long black line advanced. Oceans swells started to rise and we rushed to keep our ship from toppling us all into the dark waters. White from the fury of its own churning, the sea smashed into the sides of our ship, hurled spray into our eyes, rushed across the deck to deviously roll under our feet. Within the first few minutes it pulled Charles Havian into its maw.

"Throw a rope, save him, save him!" someone shouted; I could barely hear over the roaring of the waves and the sky. Captain was bellowing for us to get back to work, tie this or that down, make sure the passengers stayed below.

How long it was before the pounding rain died down I am not certain.

Surely it had been hours, though it felt as years of desperate struggle had passed. The ship was listing badly to starboard, and more men than just Havian were missing. Another long time of battle followed, gasping for breath, pulling and straining with every aching muscle. The moon crept out from behind the tattered remnants of the storm clouds and shed her pale light on our pitiful efforts. I redoubled my efforts, hoping a sailor's hope of living through

the night, spurned on by that distant light. What a siren's call it turned out to be.

I tried to control my breathing. Miriam, next to me, let out a soft whimper, and I covered her mouth with my hand. Damn the woman if she gave us away! I shut my eyes tight against the darkness, trying to will it away, trying to wish myself home.

Hawk had never led us wrong. From the crow's nest, he had once picked a path for us through a maze of sandbars with an English galleon on our trail at low tide. He could climb the rigging like none of us could, and unlike many sailors he was never dishonest. Not while on duty, at least. Most importantly, he never missed an approaching ship or a hidden reef.

But this night, no! I should have known we were cursed.

A man was beside me, clutching my shoulder, shouting and gesturing with his other hand. Passengers on the deck? At a time like this? The fog that wrapped about my mind as I worked began to clear. I turned my head, looking for Captain to order these dirt lovers below decks. A whole crowd of them stood about, clinging to one another and trying to keep their feet. One of the fools was even trying to blow his nose with his pocket kerchief!

But then Hawk failed. Perhaps the rain was still in his eyes, or maybe it was just too dark. It was not a ship that crept up on us. Something hit our ship, shook it as if we had hit a reef. I grabbed a nearby rope as the man next to me slipped and slid over the rail. The ship swung about as if caught on something. More bodies tumbled past, mouths open in screams I could not hear, eyes wide in fear I could feel all too keenly. Only then did Hawk begin to shout. We were being boarded.

A pale hand reached up, grasped the rail, and pulled up a pale body behind it. Oh, if only I had stayed on land, had never set sail in my fifteenth year. Horrors, we were

being boarded by horrors from the cold deeps of the hellish seas. On two feet it stood, like a man, but covered in pale, fishy looking skin, if skin it was. Wide lidless eyes, fragmented like those of a fly and glittering in the moonlight, gazed at the deck as the head turned from side to side. I turned away, wild prayers spinning in my mind, never settling on a single one. More of the creatures dragged themselves up on the deck, and my shipmates began to scream. From the corner of my eye I saw some of my fellows mount an attack; but I, shamefully, ran like a coward. As I made my way below deck, I heard screams begin to rend the air.

A soft scrape across wood came to my ears. They were slithering about the ship, doing God knows what. I could feel Miriam shivering against me, her muscles tense, her hands clutching her skirts. I damned myself with the thoughts, but I knew that if it would buy me a few more precious seconds of life, or the slightest chance to escape this damned vessel, I would throw Miriam into the inhuman claws of those monsters.

I slammed through doors while above me I heard the agonizing screams of men who have lost their souls. I passed through the kitchen, across the sleeping hall, and came into the passenger cabins. A small group of them was arguing; I pushed through them and ignored their panicked questions. But they started to follow me. A diversion was needed.

"We're being boarded," I said, cutting through their meaningless babble. "Go through the kitchen, use what you can to barricade the door. Captain's orders, don't let no one but him through." They gaped at me, open mouths reminding me in a brief flash of the creatures above. "Go!" I snapped at them, trying to sound like Captain when he was angry and we knew someone was going to get the lash. They jumped and got to it. Good. I grabbed a lantern from where it hung on a beam and went on my way.



I passed through the trapdoor and down a narrow set of steps to the lowest cabins on the ship, a dark, continually damp series of rooms we used for storage. I grabbed a chain and looped it through the handle on the trapdoor. With shaking hands I hung any heavy object I could from the chain; with any luck, it would keep the beasts out, for a time at least. That task done, I moved deeper into the ship when a voice stopped me.

"Hello? Wilhelm, is that you? I thought-"

I interrupted with a snarled question, "Who is there?" A young woman came forward into the light, eyes wide and hands shaking. The bottom of her skirt was wet and her hair was tangled, but she stood straight even though fear shone in her eyes.

In a voice that barely shook, she answered me. "I am Miriam, Miriam Belveau. What is happening above? We heard things, things on the outside of the ship, and while my companions thought to argue I thought it best to, to find a place..." She trailed away and avoided my eyes, but I understood her all too well. I wanted to shout at her, witness to my cowardice even while afflicted with her own, wanted to force her above. But she knew where I was now, might tell those, those things above in an effort to save herself by betraying my hiding place. It would be best to keep her here.

"We are being boarded. It would be best for you to stay here with me until it is safe above. Come, there is a cabin there that can be barred from the inside."

We shivered together, Miriam and I, my hand still over her mouth, my eyes still shut. I could hear the chain rattling, wood being tapped together. They had found the trapdoor. Still above there were no voices, only soft, scraping steps. There was little time.

"...to be married in a month's time. Wilhelm - that is, my brother, youngest of all my siblings - is escorting me to my fiancé." I wished Miriam would be silent. She spoke

in a soft tone, but her voice grated nonetheless. I don't care about her life, want to know nothing about it. I wondered how long it would take for the lantern to go out. In the dark, no way out, with a woman who won't shut up and soulless monsters prowling above.

From time to time Miriam would go silent, as they both heard sounds on the hull of the ship. Digging, scraping sounds. More beasts climbing aboard. I try not to think of the passengers' last defense. I try not to think of Captain. I try not to think of Hawk, waiting alone in the crow's nest, with a perfect view of the crew being slaughtered, stuck like I am until those things come for him.

There is a clatter as the chain breaks and falls to the floor. Miriam shakes in fear. I bow my head. With my free hand, I draw a knife from my boot. It will be better this way.

## ***LITTLE TYRANNY***

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**Ayanna A. Powell**

She stands, shouts, screams, moves  
All she does...  
Cause pain, feel hurt, and numb the ache  
Leave then return.  
The pain hidden, yet now revealed,  
On the bench...  
Out, asleep, all fears and insecurities take flight.  
Her wrinkled face  
Peaceful, calm like an angel,  
Almost...  
Heavenly time, most joyous time  
She sleeps  
Half dead, and seemingly unaware.  
The world rest, only because  
She sleeps



## ***GONE***

---

**Ayanna A. Powell**

Look me in the eye,  
Three thousands world apart,  
    Brain of a Bat  
    Heart of a lion  
Feel and fizzle  
Breathe and become  
Nature's destiny  
    Baby, take that first step.

## ***TAKE OUT THE TRASH, PLEASE***

---

**Ayanna A. Powell**

Garbage collector works on Tuesday,  
Today is Tuesday.  
Staring out the window, hesitating watching her chance go  
by.  
Needs to take out the trash,  
If she knew what was good for her,  
She would get rid of it.  
Her mother's possible angered thought,  
"You created this mess; therefore you need to clean it up"  
Before her mother finds out, before her mother gets here...  
Her mother,  
Well kept, well put together, wouldn't like this mess  
The key in the lock reiterate that someone is here,  
Her mother.  
An inner voice whispered "get it together"  
-No time, it's too late, she sees me, finds out, yells, tears.  
She continues to yell, more tears, disappointment, pain hurt,  
tears and more tears, I hurt. It echoes as she yells louder....  
I whispered,  
"Mother I will not have an abortion"

## ***RED LIGHT***

---

**Ayanna A. Powell**

As if yesterday, I remembered,  
holding that gun, and pulling that  
trigger, reaching in his pocket,  
pulling out his wallet, taking his money,  
no looking back, taking his life.

As if yesterday, I remembered  
leaving that motel room, cleaning  
my hands, red, blood on my hands,  
blood on my conscience, taking  
his last breath, taking that label.

As if yesterday, I remembered,  
running down that stairs, stopping  
to observe, that little girl, flowers in hand  
innocence in those blue eyes, feeling  
guilty, shaking, feeling that desperate

As if yesterday, I remembered,  
sirens going off, lights flashing  
dogs barking, chasing, racing  
to get away, trying to be free  
trying not to get caught.

As if yesterday, I remembered  
speeding, instant shock, sudden halt.

The light turned red.

## ***TRUE LOVE***

---

**Ayanna A. Powell**

Yellow smiles, beautiful reaction  
Blue tears, amazing distractions.  
Green blossoms of hope lingers  
Tan image upon my very fingers.

Mountains bow down at your modest beauty  
Caves and cliffs warn danger looming.  
Rivers flow in a bond of harmony, hmm  
Contentment, the feeling calls to me.

Glorious presence, make people feel so warm  
Personalities, people perfectly calm.  
A new culture, explored  
Magnificent Moments simple adored

Oh Jamaica, how I missed you so!

## ***TALES OF A RACE CHAMELEON***

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### **Luis Orosco**

The silence was almost unbearable for the Orosco family, used to constant battles of sarcasm and jokes; we just looked at each other, searching for comfort. Painfully spitted jokes broke the silence in the effort to pretend that this was just another day. Once in a while we looked at the clock then looked at each other with a bit of shame. The silence was broken by my brother Alberto, "It is nine," he said, time to go. I hugged them all. No words were needed. We knew each other too well.

I grabbed my bags and walked towards the door. I could not resist touching the walls that my brothers and I built. I rubbed my fingers to feel the dusty paint impregnated in them. I turned around and looked at everything. I have a history in every single corner of that room and every piece of furniture. I took a big breath as I opened the door hoping to capture the smell of home.

As I stepped to the street I noticed the people running towards the hills. I walked toward the main route with José and my mother; the silence came along. From the main route I saw flames in a section of my town, covering several blocks. When I looked at my mother she read the expression on my face. "Don't look back," she shouted. A feeling of betrayal suffocated my breath while I sat in the car. I was leaving my people whom I protected and loved for years. I was leaving my world, when it needed me the most. The two hour ride felt like an eternity. I stared at the window and I saw pictures of my life, my childhood, fear, pain, hunger and hope.

In the airport, I looked at my mother and all I saw was that her eyes were starting to water. A few tears ran down from her eyes just to get lost in her wrinkled face, in lines

that have names, histories, and experiences, like an old tree that tells her journey and constant battle in the shape of its lines. I did not ever remember seeing her cry. She wiped her tears, embarrassed, took a breath, smiled and told me, "Don't let people tell you who you are." I agreed and hugged her as hard as I could. I touched her face and smelled her perfume, hoping to make that moment last forever.

The plane felt like a dark cave, with nobody else but me and my thoughts. The ten hour flight felt like a minute. The sounds of the tires scraping the ground brought me back to reality. I looked through the windows. It wasn't Peru anymore. I walked out of the plane into a poorly lit walkway that connected to the airport. I felt like an explorer about to enter a wild tribal village. Halfway out I saw a couple of immigration police asking Hispanics to make a line, and letting white people go. I kept walking. At the age of twenty-six I thought I had been already described in every single racial and ethnic group I could fit. One of the police officers stopped me and tried to explain to me really slowly that I have to wait too. He spoke loudly because everybody knows that English is easier to understand, for non-English speakers, when you speak it loudly and slowly. Another officer who spoke fluent Spanish took me to an office and on the way there told me, "This is America; you are a Hispanic here." I didn't bother to argue that. I was cleared to enter to this country. I walked to customs a bit confused. The customs officer checked my bags and carefully sliced my bag with his pocket knife. He put everything in a bag and, smiling, told me "Welcome to America". I was officially accepted. Outside of the arrival doors my fiancée waited for me with a hug, a grin, a Dunkin' Donuts bag and the promise of a new life.

In the weeks after, I met new people including myself, Luis the Hispanic. The more people I met the more I found out about myself: what I do, what I like to eat, and what many other things I like. Some of those assumptions were



true, others were so off that I couldn't help laughing. My beloved Peru became part of México and sometimes an island and for some others, it was just the place where cocaine came from.

I spent long hours asking myself who I am and who I want to be. I was so impressed by the culture and the fast turn in my life that I forgot my mother's advice. I'm Luis, not Louis or Lou, as many people call me, and I was going to face life like a Peruvian. I worked on my English singing along with Frank Sinatra and reading TV captions. I refused to take a job where I could use Spanish or where I would be singled out; I was going to make it in America. I've heard about the American dream, a big house with a white picket fence, nice lawn and friendly neighbors. Just being accepted, that is mine.

Sometimes people ask me why I do things the way I do and I'm really proud to answer – "because I'm a Peruvian." Some people might think that Peru is a place filled with little, brown, stubborn people that never give up. My heart gets filled with pride every time I say that because memories of my family come to my mind, the depression, the hunger and my mother's strength that kept us together.

A lot of people opened their hearts without caring where I was from, others just showed me how dangerous ignorance can be and how much words can actually hurt. People would be surprised if they ask me who I am, how many stories I have to tell, how much love I have in me, and how I see life. They don't know what they miss when they prejudice somebody. I stopped trusting in people and avoiding making contact with them. I started my own prejudging. Is that how it happened? I Was becoming one of them? I hid all these things to my loved ones because I thought they could not understand my feelings, or maybe I was just ashamed of being stripped of my dignity without reason. "You must hate this country," somebody told me when I disclosed some of my issues; I don't have any hate,



maybe some anger, but hate is a feeling that I cannot allow myself. I love this country and the people, at least most of them, and besides is not totally their fault; they don't know me.

Some people may think that I'm too sensitive over something as small as being called Hispanic or Latino, but it is not the names that bother me. It is the assumptions that come with them, people that feel the need to ask me if my wife is fifteen, if I'm illegal, or if I paid taxes; and feel entitled to tell me that my kids eat out of their taxes. They ask if I can speak American, Christian or human just because my English is not as good and theirs.

Being Hispanic is not all bad. It has some benefits. Sometimes I feel like a race chameleon. I can mix pretty well. When I go to Chicago, people see me as Mexican. In Miami I can be seen as Cuban. In Rhode Island I'm Guatemalan and Puerto Rican in Fitchburg; I even have been asked if I was Philippine or Laotian. I see them all and I wonder if we really look alike. No matter how hard I look, I cannot see the similarity. Actually, I have to agree, we really look alike after all, are we not all humans?

One day, my two year old jumped up really excited on my lap, held my dark hands trying to get his little fingers in between mine and told me, "I'm a brown Taye, and you are a brown Daddy." A sense of confusion stoned me. I hugged him really tight, "Yes, we are brown", I answered. I was ashamed of myself. I never actually planned on telling my kid that he was brown or Peruvian and of course Hispanic was not an option; I refused to teach him Spanish for reasons that I cannot explain to myself. Sometimes I get lost in his big brown eyes wishing that I could change people's mind. I want him to know that he is Peruvian, before people introduce him as "Hispanic Taye". I want to hug him and protect him and give him the strength to tolerate other people's ignorance. Sometimes when I see him playing with the Dorseys, his white, blonde, blue eyed cousins, my heart

gets filled of hope. Maybe they will learn from our mistakes and look at each other as just people, with no prejudice or distrust.

Now people call me Lou, the Hispanic, Latino, Spanish and other things. I would love to say that my story is unique, like a dragon tale that I built with a creative imagination, but it is just one of many immigrant stories like many of your ancestors could tell. Sometimes I see airplanes flying over me and I wonder how many stories and dreams are about to land and how much we can learn if we just pay attention.

## ***DOWN TO EVEN GROUND***

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**Blaise Collins**

Sand slipping down  
Down  
Down  
Down  
We begin our decent down the hour glass.

We all ride with this sand  
The same sand  
Yet we bicker and fight  
“Mine has more color.”  
“Your sand is the wrong color.”  
But in the end  
Sand of white, sand of black, sand of peasant, sand of king  
All fall down.

For some this depresses  
Changing how the day transgresses.  
For me it invigorates  
Win the new day it creates.

## *AS IF*

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### **Kao Sheng Moua**

All of a sudden my eyes went blur  
As if someone took my sight from me  
My heart pounding  
As if I was auditioning on stage  
Butterflies in my stomach  
As if I was on a roller coaster  
My hands are trembling  
As if I was nervous  
My palms are sweating  
As if I was being questioned  
My body weakened  
As if someone had taken my energy  
I can't help myself but stare  
As if someone had caught my attention  
I have fallen in love  
As if it was my first time all over again

## **WHO SAID I HAD TO LOVE THEM ANYWAY?**

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**Marcia Hill**

Every person has a family member they would rather not talk about; well my whole family is like that. At best I was born into a dysfunctional family. At worse I was born to a mother who worked too much and a father who couldn't control his temper. As for the rest of my family; it consists of drug addicts, child abusers, spouse abusers, liars, thieves, and basically criminals in general. Now don't get me wrong, I don't mean to make them sound like bad people. I love my family very much; I am just stating that facts of their lives. Every family has their ups and downs; mine just has more than others.

My mother was born into a poor family. They often didn't have enough money for food so they basically survived on eating bread and soup for most meals. As a girl my mother vowed that if she ever had children, her children would have everything they wanted or needed. She certainly kept her word. Life was never easy for my mother. She has always had at least two jobs, sometimes even three. My sister and I certainly have been spoiled as a result of her working so much.

Shortly after my sister was born, my parents' relationship started to fall apart. My mother didn't want another child, but my father threatened to kill her if she got an abortion. So in fear for her, life she had my sister. At that point in life my father was heavily into drugs and alcohol. He started to take out all his aggressions on my mother. She received regular beatings after my sister was born. I remember one time in particular. My dad was watching us because my mom was working. When she came home she had brought home some groceries.

Apparently she had gotten my dad the wrong soda and he flipped out. Then next thing I see is him punching my mother in the mouth and screaming at her. My mom tried to leave with my sister and I several times, but she always went back because she was afraid that my dad would kill her.

My mother finally got up enough strength to leave my father when I was about ten years old. My grandmother was in the hospital dying and my father was in jail again. The prison allowed him to leave for a few hours to go see his mother. He was escorted by a prison guard. My mother happened to be at the hospital at the same time. The prison guard left my father in the room so that he could call and check into the prison. As soon as the guard was gone my father attacked my mother right there in the hospital where his mother was dying. That was the last straw for my mother. She finally left him after being abused for over ten years.

I don't want to make my father look like a monster, because he is not. He never had an easy life. He was born into a family of nine children. He was born the third youngest of the group. He had acid poured on him as a child and he received severe burns on his body from it. The incident was an accident, but it still affected him. He grew up in a home where his father was an alcoholic and his mother had a very nasty temper. He watched his parents fight all the time. His father would hit his mother and she would in turn chase him around the house with a butcher knife. It's no wonder my father was so violent. After all violence only breeds more violence.

My father fell into step with the wrong crowd. He got into drugs at a very young age. He was expelled from school when he was twelve years old and he never went back to school. At the age of sixteen he was involved in a home invasion with some of his friends. They broke into an old man's house. They tied the old man up and robbed him. The old man ended up having a heart attack and dying. My



father was arrested. He wouldn't snitch any of his friends out so he took the wrap for all of them and was charged with involuntary manslaughter. He was sent to jail for five years. That was the first of many jail sentences for him.

My father's siblings were just as bad as he was when they were younger. People that know my family always refer to them as bad people. The truth is they are not bad, they were shown bad examples. It is hard to do something you were never shown; kind of like trying to solve a complex math equation without ever being shown how to do it. My father's brothers and sister have grown up a little bit over the years. Most of them are off drugs. They still do shady dealings, but for the most part they behave themselves.

As for my father, he was recently diagnosed with bipolar disease. He is on medication now, which has calmed him down a lot. He isn't on drugs anymore, but he stills drinks sometimes. Unfortunately, my father contracted a disease from his younger years that is slowly killing him. I don't expect my father to live more than five years. The doctors are not very hopeful either. I know that my father was not exactly an upstanding citizen and he did hit me and my mother, I still love him dearly. He is my father after all and he would do anything in his power for me.

My mother's siblings are not angels either. My mother was born the youngest of five children. One of her sisters is a drug addict and a prostitute. My aunt was always wild as a child and got worse as she got older. She is the reason that I have never and will never do drugs. She is a prime example of someone who will never learn their lesson. I do sympathize with her on some levels. I understand that drug use is an addiction. It doesn't make her evil; it just means that she is powerless to her addictions.

My mother is the one good one in the group. She is currently married to a man that loves her dearly. She still works a lot, but I suppose that it is because it is human nature for her. She will always work a lot. My mother has



forgiven my father and they have become friends. They still love each other and they always will. They do after all have children together.

Though it may seem like I come from a bad family, they are not that bad. They may have made some bad choices if life, but most of them had good intentions. I truly believe that you have to love your family no matter who they are or what they have done. They are your blood line and the only family you will ever have. I love my family and I wouldn't change them. They are not perfect and they never will be, but they are the reason I am who I am. In my eyes they are the perfect family for me. They will always be there for me no matter what and I wouldn't change that for the world.

## **TIMELESS**

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### **Meghan Hume**

My hand is cramping, my pencil is breaking, and my eraser is running out. I'm trying to rush, I don't... I can't miss the plane. I know the answers, or so I think. "Three more pages! When will this be over?" My frantic mind skims over the questions of my AP Psychology exam like lightening. I need to get out of here fast. I only have an hour or so to grab my bags, catch a cab, and get to the airport for my flight at 3 p.m. Minutes seem like hours, until finally! I'm finished. I throw my bag on my shoulder; toss the number 2 pencil and exam, which I crumpled in the process, and threw them on my professors' desk. As I run out the door I hear my professor yell down the hall "See you next semester, Matthew!" His words trailed on like a train blowing its horn in the distance.

"Only a half an hour left," I think as I look out the dirty window of this smelly cab that I grabbed before someone else did. I usually give the cab to someone else that has been waiting, but not this time. There is no time. I got to get home.

I met my mom at the airport as I pulled in to my little old town in Tennessee. She had been crying. I could tell by the redness on her nose. "How is she?" I asked. There was a tight knot in my throat just then. My mother looks at me with worry in her eyes. She lies and says she is doing ok when really my sister is doing awful. We both know it; she didn't have to say it.

We can't visit her at the hospital, yet because she is going through some treatments, so we went back to the farm house where everyone is staying. I walk in and there is my Aunt Mary, Uncle Joe, cousins Jack, Jessie, and Ray, my

father, brothers Tommy and Jason, and of course our dog Jackson. Today is a warm and perfect summer day. The pond across the field is decorated with lily pads and their beautiful white flowers seem to glitter in the sunlight, the golden yellow wheat stalks growing in the fields beckon thin shadows across the way and the willow tree next to my sister's room blows in the warm summer breeze. I stand outside on the porch and watch the peacefulness of our farm. I watch that tree. She would climb out her window and into that tree every night in the summer time to watch the sky. She would climb to the highest branch she could and called me a sissy for staying on the ground. She is fearless and I, on the other hand, am not. She always asked me, "What do you think is out there, Matt? Do you think time is forever? Do ever wish you could just float away amongst the stars and forget about time?" I never really thought about time... until now.

"Why don't you come inside and eat, Matty?" Mom always had a very loud voice, like a huge roll of thunder during a southern summer storm. I'm not sure if I have much of an appetite. I am too anxious and the farm is calming me, but I'll go inside anyway. There is a huge buffet set up in the kitchen specially prepared by my mother and aunt. They must have spent all yesterday and this morning preparing it. There is turkey, stuffing, cornbread, collard greens, cranberry sauce, potatoes, fried chicken, corn, and an assortment of desserts.

"So, Matthew, how is school going out there in the big city? Meet any sweet city girls?" My uncle yelled across the loud table full of clinking dishes and chattering family members. "It's okay," I yelled back "and no, I haven't met any of those, yet." We chuckled. He always asked me about girls, especially since his wife passed away 2 years ago. He wants to know everything he can about the girls in the city, it interests him. "Are they fine up there, Matty? Are they like the women down here?" "No, not really, they all are

pretty thin. No curvy shapes like you like, Uncle Joe." I wink. He laughs. I guess laughter is the best medicine for all of us right now. "Sorry to cut in boys." My mother says as she stands between us and places a hand on both our shoulders. "It's time to say grace. Matthew, will you do the honors?" "Of course, Ma." and I start to say a prayer. Somehow my sister made her way into the prayer and I don't think anyone really expected it, but we were all thinking it. God must have wanted her in that prayer.

"Dear Lord, We all would like to thank you for this food you have placed on this table. We thank you for friends, for family, and for this time together. We also take this time to pray that our dear sister, cousin, and niece will be safe in your arms and that time will heal all. We thank you for your grace. In the Lord's name, Amen."

As we enter the bright white hospital, that distinct smell of the building hit us all in the face. "I hate hospitals," Jessie exclaimed. "They freak me out!" I think we can all relate to that statement right now. We all take a seat in the waiting room, anxiously waiting to see her. It is a small room with a tiny 13-inch TV hanging on the wall playing a commercial about watches, cushioned metal chairs with magenta colored fabric, magazines on the coffee table and a plastic tree in one of the corners. "Time is everything," the man shouted on TV. "Get her something she won't forget. Our timeless watches are a gift everyone can enjoy. Personalize it with her name engraved on the back! Only \$19.95! Call to place your order now!"

Just then, the nurse peeks her small head around the corner and calls us in. I am not ready yet. I feel guilty. I haven't talked to her in about a month and a half. We used to talk every day, even if it was just hello. I tell

everyone else to go first. I need to see her alone. As I sit and wait for my turn, I begin to sweat. I am so nervous. I don't want to see my baby sister hooked up to machines and IV's. She was always a free bird, a free spirit, caged up in a hospital bed, caged up in this disease.

Time seems to be passing so slowly. I am thankful for it, though. I know she was still alive, still hanging on like everyone else in that room, hanging on for this boy in the lonely waiting room. I can see everyone walking towards the waiting room. My mother is crying, my aunt is consoling her and everyone else is quiet and hanging their heads. This isn't too promising. I muster up every little bit of courage I have and take the long walk down the hall to room 223.

There she is, quietly lying, hooked up with all kinds of wires and machines. This is not the sister I once knew, but she is. Her long, brown hair... is gone, all gone. She is pale and very thin. I sit down in a chair similar to the ones in the waiting room and I pull it up next to her bed. I take her hand and say with a sigh, "Sarah, I've missed you so much." She had tears in her eyes as she looked at me. "I know," her small voice strained. I just sat there and I did not move a muscle. It is quiet for what seemed like hours, but it has only been about 5 minutes. Only the quiet electrical noises of her monitors and the hum of the TV are heard. Then she turns to me and whispers, "Matty, I'm scared. I didn't want to tell anyone but I'm so scared." I don't know what to say. I know this wasn't a time to make her laugh like I always used to. "I know, Sar. I am too. But you can handle anything. You're the strong one in this family." "You know what I miss the most," she begins, watching the stars flicker in the night sky for so long that my summer nights seemed to last for ages. I didn't have to worry about how much time I had left to see them." And again... silence. I kiss her on her bare forehead and as I put my head onto



hers, I whisper into her ear, "I am sorry we haven't talked in so long. I am so sorry. I love you so much, Sarah." She wipes a tear from my eye. "I love you too Matthew," she paused, Will you do me a favor and open the curtains?" I push the chair back to its place and let the bright lights of the night sky shine through her window. I climb up onto her hospital bed, hold her in my arms, and we watch the stars together. We aren't worrying about time. Just as I start drifting off to sleep, I feel her go limp in my arms. Now, all I can hear is her heart rate monitor making one long and steady beep.

It is the next afternoon now. I make myself a spot in that willow tree on our farm. I sit and stared into the sky all day and into night. This particular night seems to be so clear, so warm, almost perfect. I feel a breeze through the leaves and it tickles my arm. I feel her here. She is in this tree. She is in this sky. She is finally floating amongst the stars, where time is forever.



## **WINGS**

---

**Joseph Benavidez**

Hair blowing in the breeze  
He looks down to see  
The failure of green  
Staring back at him all mean  
Head tilted up  
White in the shape of a shrub  
He'll cross his fingers and hope to fly  
It's either that or die

## ***SIX UNTITLED***

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### **Joseph Benavidez**

never was a love so pure  
as me and my amour dure  
a love so pure the angels sought  
but they could not have our love  
and thus we fought  
they came and took my love  
now it is just me  
in the castle by the sea

---

I come and go  
as I please  
like a summer's breeze  
for the wind blows  
where the wind blows

---

ghost of the past  
haunting a soul  
his future will not last  
his evil deeds will take their toll  
demon of the night  
will no longer be  
for the angel of fright  
will make him pay his fee

I've began to really see myself  
While I never liked my reflection  
I could always see my inner beauty  
But now as I look closer  
I notice something sad  
My inner beauty is fool's gold  
I saw a nugget  
And thought myself rich

---

If only, If only  
four words with no power  
yet they trap hundreds  
of thousands of men alike  
each one forced to live  
a life filled with doubt  
and true darkness  
oh how I know  
If Only, If Only

----

Darkness will for  
ever haunt us  
now.  
Heed my soul  
its full of pain  
searching for a  
clear way home  
don't trust the  
Angel look-a-like  
she is truly a  
Demon in waiting.

## ***I'M UNDONE***

---

### **Rachel Jessica Gallo**

Fate exists but it can only take you so far because once you're there it's up to you to make it happen,

but why would fate let us meet if there is no way for us to be together...

Black clouds revolving overhead part of me is gone.  
Like water now with in my hands it all runs away.

As every second slips away, I have nothing left to show.  
I'm undone without you now.

I'm in a million elements.  
I'm just not myself if you say I'm not yours.

I was only ever myself when I was with you.  
Thank God for my offspring to keep me strong.

The storm sets in --  
I put my hands out grasping on to time.

If you ever beseech, know the answer will always be yes.  
This heavy heart is caving in underneath this good bye.

Is this even a real good bye?  
Either way I'm undone.

## ***THE SEEKER***

---

**Rachel Jessica Gallo**

Melancholy phantoms eye our skins,  
poisoned apples falling with the wind

hear the sigh of the trees saying leave, leave!  
Help me out said the minnow to the trout.

We must find a new home now.  
The rabbits scatter and don't want to be found.

Maybe we don't want you tracking us down.

But they'll keep seeking until we're stuffed  
in your closet of keeps.

## ***THE CHILD***

---

**Michael Weston Mercier**

The young man felt dizzy as he held his child. Everything seemed unreal. How could it have happened? She had come out of nowhere. For a minute he doubted his own eyes. But there she was, a baby girl, as real as anything he had ever seen or touched. Maybe he would wake up, maybe it all was a nightmare. He wasn't ready, he knew nothing about being a parent. He had not even a job to support her with. And then there was college, how could he manage?

The man looked down at the child. The child smiled. She looked much like him, he thought. The man smiled back, a tear flowing slowly down one cheek. Was it a tear of joy or fear, most likely a mix of both. The man shifted his arms to a more comfortable position, trying to remember the best way to hold a baby. She closed her eyes and fell into slumber. The man's fear was erased in an instant by an overwhelming love for the child, his daughter.

The man, now a father, watched as the years seemed to pass in minutes. He heard his daughter's first word, "Daddy." He watched her take her first step, with pride. He walked her to her first day at preschool with a father's worry and waited with a parent's nervousness for her safe return. First to senior grades flashed by him in seconds, each one filled with loving memories. The man cried as he watched her graduate and felt a bitter pride when she left for college.

The man could hear the wedding bells ring, and he felt proud. He had been a god father, he thought. There might even be grandchildren, he thought with a chuckle. The bells seemed to grow louder. He felt his eye's blur with age. The bells now turned into a monotonous ring, as the man felt himself being torn away into the darkness.



The man awoke to the sound of the alarm clock with a bitter hatred, knowing it had been a dream. His daughter was gone. The loss hurt the man. As the man was about to leave the apartment in bitterness, he looked out the window. The young man smiled and went out the door.

## ***AMERICA! FUCK YEAH!***

---

### **Nick Rudomin**

The sun rises on a typical every day.  
Children are put on the school bus; mom and dad  
enjoy a cup of coffee.  
Matt Lauer is addressing the morning crowd  
of the daily news.  
The mill is going overtime on a typical every day.  
Men young and old put in their hours  
for an honest day's pay.  
Risks are high, but the job needs to be done.  
The horses roam on a typical everyday.  
Paddocks need to be cleaned.  
They frolic about looking to graze and get their exercise.  
The pizza shop gets ready for a lunch rush  
on a typical every day.  
The sauce is stirred, the dough is prepped.  
Customers need to eat before boss man returns.  
The first pitch is thrown on a typical every day.  
I sit on dad's lap hoping for a foul ball.  
Peanuts and Cracker Jacks, this is the life.  
The painter paints on a typical every day.  
Hoping to make the next Whistler's Mother  
He dreams and wishes to be the next big thing.  
Detroit is making cars on a typical every day.  
The world needs to get around.  
A whole city prides itself on being the provider for so many.  
This is America, on a typical every day.

## *ME AND YOU*

---

**Nick Rudomin**

Penn and Teller,  
Bonnie and Clyde,  
Montana and Rice,  
You and Me.

Penn HAD Teller,  
Bonnie HAD Clyde  
Montana HAD Rice  
You HAD me.

Penn was nothing without Teller,  
Bonnie was nothing without Clyde,  
Montana was nothing without Rice  
You were nothing without me.

We didn't do magic. We were magic.  
We didn't do the crime. But we did do the time.  
We didn't do sports. But we were a team

People need that partner in life.  
I was no different.  
My success was your success.  
Now I have none.  
But my lack of success is just that.  
Mine and not ours.

## ***THEN AND NOW***

---

### **Nick Rudomin**

I was once the cheetah hunting his prey.  
Now I am just a vulture, praying for scraps just to survive.  
I was once a tsunami attacking the world.  
Now I am just a white cap on society.  
I was once the lead singer, with all eyes on me.  
Now I am just a roadie wheeling about with no attention paid.  
I was once the one dawning Versace with such confidence.  
Now I am just wearing Hanes and hanging my head down low.  
I was once Charles Dickens, people yearned to hear what I had to say.  
Now I am just a coffee house poet, I can't even pay people to come.  
I was once Lobster Newburg, only the rich and famous dared to try me.  
Now I am just Spam, I'd be surprised if I was picked up.  
I was once The All-American athlete, I was God.  
Now I am just Junior-Varsity, waiting for my time to come.  
I was once the Mega Millions, people wanted to have their hands on me.  
Now I am just a dollar bill, there but never appreciated.  
I was once was never lost, always to be found.  
Now I am blind, and I wish to see.  
I was once the man who had it all, I never knew pain.  
Now I am the man with nothing, I know nothing good.  
I was once in love, on top of the world.  
Now I am not, and I wonder how I can ascend.

## ***THE NOT-FORSAKEN WOMAN OF COLOR***

---

### **Heidi Surette-Narcisse**

I am a strong, intelligent, African-American woman, a mother, wife, sister, aunt, and great friend. Throughout my life, I have been through many obstacles that, I believe, were meant to set me up for failure and intentionally make me weak as a person. In reality, those obstacles made me who I am today.

An obstacle that I face every day is not just being a person of color, but a bi-racial woman of color. Being a bi-racial woman, I should have been able to identify myself as either Caucasian or African-American. However, by my skin tone and features, society determined my identity before I was even old enough to understand that there was a difference in the races. Society erroneously stereotypes people of color. For me, my capabilities and potential as an individual have been questioned.

I'm also a plus size woman. Plus size women, in general, carry a stigma that no one else carries, not even enormous men! The ideology is that women who are big are lazy slobs, not having enough discipline to just shut their mouths and stop eating. Contrary to popular belief, there are many reasons for obesity that have absolutely nothing to do with being lazy, sloppy, or undisciplined. I have been, and continue to be, judged by my appearance, my size as well as my color, but not my character. The cliché, "Don't judge a book by its cover" fits how I believe society should view me as a person. Instead of "opening the book" and getting to know me, they judge me by the color of my

skin and the size of my body without knowing any details of my life.

Another obstacle that I've had to struggle with was

being raised by a single Caucasian mother and an absent African-American father. Thirty years ago, bi-racial relationships were taboo, especially relationships that resulted in children. Somehow, people thought that Caucasian women that had relationships with black men were second class citizens, women who didn't fit the "normal" white society. My mother took more of an emotional beating because of it than my sister and I did, but we still felt it. Being a single parent only made the gossip worse. My mother struggled and did whatever she could to support my sister and I as children, and that was very difficult, but not as difficult as having a father who went to his grave never acknowledging me. Never speaking to him or even knowing what he looked like left me feeling incomplete, like part of me was missing. I always knew that my mother loved me, and continues to, love me more than anything in this world, but there still feels like there's something missing in my heart that, now with the death of my father, will never come to fruition.

Today, I am the mother of three African-American girls, Saysha, Sondrea, and Jeané ages 17, 14, and 10 respectively. Should society continue in its current mode, my girls will face, and already have a few times, the same preconceived stereotypical ideas of their worth and abilities. There are times when I appear to be more intense, more driven, then some mothers would be in raising their children, but I know firsthand the frustration they will face if they are not taught to be strong and proud of their heritage as African-American women. All of my girls have the propensity to be plus size like I am even though we consciously work at keeping their weight down. Because of that, I purposely push them to do and explore anything that they are interested in, even things that might be considered for "small" people.

My oldest daughter, Saysha, is graduating from high school this year and wants to pursue a career in nursing.



While I would like to think that she wouldn't be discriminated against in a professional nursing career, I've been through enough to know better. She will reach adulthood very shortly, and the thought of not being able to protect her from society's stereotypes is very frightening. Because she the first to leave home, I have put a lot of positive influence in her life to teach her not only how to act but how to protect herself from the obstacles I've faced myself.

My middle daughter, Sondrea, is a plus size girl and continuously struggles with low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in her abilities. She is the friendliest warm-hearted child I've met in a while and has loads of friends. While Sondrea is Miss Social Butterfly, no matter how much encouragement I give her, she won't participate in any school functions except for a couple dances in middle school. Hopefully, by giving her the same positive influences I gave Saysha when she entered high school, her self-esteem and confidence can increase with maturity.

My youngest daughter, Jeané, has recently gained a lot of weight due to medication that she absolutely can't stop using because of her allergies and asthma. She battles with wanting to play more sports like she used to but can't because of her asthma. She used to be in cheerleading and gymnastics, but can't do either of them anymore. Because of this, I struggle with trying to find activities that she likes and is willing to participate in. I worry that as she gets older, like my middle daughter, she will struggle with self-esteem issues also.

With the various hats I wear, I have had to find ways of dealing with the frustrations and aggravations of life. I have found a way that works for me to overcome the difficulties and be at peace with my circumstances. I started going to church at age eight, finally finding a place where I could relax about who I was and be accepted and loved unconditionally unlike the harsh society I had to live in

daily. Singing, praying, and reading the Bible, and getting to know God had filled that empty space that I had been missing. When I was in church, there were many Bible verses that I had read, but one in particular that always soothed my heart was Psalms 27:10, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." This verse gave me, and continues to give me, strength and inner peace especially when facing the difficulties of life. While being a woman of color has it's continuous problems, it's who I am, not who society wants me to be, and I'm proud of it!

## ***SHE HAD A DOG***

---

**Ashley Gough**

1.

She stood in her thin satin robe on the patio smoking a cigarette and looked down at her ring. While the sex itself was mostly forgettable, there was one moment that continued to play in her head. She had been on the bed, her stomach pressed into the mattress and his heavy weight on top of her. She could feel beads of his sweat splattering down from his forehead stinging her back and it was distracting. Then, in the brief moment of his climax, his left hand reached for hers. As he grasped her, their rings knocked together leaving an echoing buzz in her head. She'd never asked him if he was married, and now that she thought about it, he never asked her either.

She turned to look at him through the patio window. He was lying on the bed naked watching the news. His casual exhibition offended her. She hadn't expected to feel this way, but what *had* she expected? Excitement, fear, guilt, love – no, not love – but something. Something that would make her feel alive, or at least have an orgasm. But instead she felt empty, more empty than before.

She turned back to look at the view from her ninth-story hotel room. The gin was easing up now and she could feel the cold night air whipping over her body. She decided to stay there forever.

2.

She had made a habit of waiting for her husband to fall asleep before she read the emails. She'd slip out of bed and tiptoe downstairs to the study. It wasn't because she

feared she might get caught. She had a feeling he knew anyway. Forcing herself to resist the temptation to compulsively check her inbox throughout the day was a practice in preservation, both of self and of this precious ritual she had created. These days it was all she had. She also liked the idea of making him wait.

*I thought about you all day today. But I guess you know that...*

She smiled, aware that his infatuation was deepening. She read on, savoring his words like morsels of meat and she was empowered. The explicit descriptions of his sexual fantasies and romantic desires were stimulating, but it was the severe desperation behind his words that really turned her on.

...

They had met at a veterinarian's office. She had to take the dog in for shots and he was in the waiting room at the clinic. He stared a little too long as she made her way to the cushioned chairs and he realized this when she smiled uncomfortably at him. He could feel the blood rush to his face, betraying him yet again with an embarrassing redness he'd learned to despise.

They were the only two people there which left an air of awkwardness in the silence that might have been more comfortably shared by a larger group. "What's his name?" he asked.

"Her name is Maggie."

"Beautiful," he said. "Your dog I mean." He cleared his throat. "What kind of dog is she?"

"She's a mixed breed." She smiled and allowed herself to be amused by his attempts to be charming.

He explained that he was waiting on his brother. "He's interning here," he said. "His car's in the shop so I'm giving him a ride home in a little while." She nodded and felt his dark eyes on her, in her. His voice shook a little when he talked and he kept stealing glances at her figure.

“And what do you do?” she asked, crossing her legs intentionally.

The silk in her voice ran through him. To avoid another embarrassing concentrated rush of blood he quickly turned his attention to her question. “I own a computer repair store,” he said, handing her his business card. “In case you know anybody who needs... anything.”

She held the card in her hand and read it slowly. Then she reached into her purse and pulled out her own business card. He brushed her hand as he took the card, and she knew it was intentional. “Doctor of Psychiatry?” he read aloud.

She laughed slightly and said, “In case you know anyone.”

The conversation continued for a few more minutes. They talked politely about how they both loved dogs, and he told her that he had a mutt of his own at home. Then she was told that the vet was ready for her. They said goodbye and he gave the Maggie a little scratch behind the ear.

He’d managed to wait four days before emailing her the first time, having found the address on her business card. After that, it was a daily practice that went on for three weeks. They were innocent pleasantries at first, but quickly evolved to an intimate level. They talked about their passions for a while, hers art and his music. But it wasn’t long before they began to cross into more amorous discussions.

...

The email was three pages, each sentence an expression of his growing need, his craving for her. He wanted her, and not just sexually. He had begun to speak of being with her. He even mentioned something about running away together. The narratives were seductive and passionate, yet were becoming a little too familiar and repetitive for her. She was beginning to desire more. She replied to the email with one line.



*Meet me at the Lofton Hotel, Thursday night at 9.*

She went back to bed and lay next to her husband. She listened to the rhythm of his snoring and tried to remember the last time he'd touched her.

3.

After receiving the email he'd been waiting impatiently for all day, he didn't sleep the rest of the night.

4.

He'd fought with his wife that night before their meeting. They fought every night so he was fairly sure that it didn't have anything to do with the sex he was about to have. Still, the adrenaline from the confrontation only helped him to get up his nerve. Just before he walked out of the house she asked him if he was coming back. He shut the door.

When she opened the door to the hotel room, his breath caught in his throat. She'd forgotten how dark his eyes were. He touched her and she wanted it. He moved his hand slowly. First her hair, and then her neck, and then her breast. It took every ounce of restraint he had not to tell her he loved her. He pulled her closer and she moaned softly.

But then he kissed her, and something changed. She ignored it and continued, but something had happened in her. Her body, fevered and ready only seconds before, turned cold. A chill ran through her and her stomach turned. She wasn't expecting this to happen... not this time. "Let's have a drink," she said.

He followed her to the mini bar and wondered how long he would be able to hold off. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," she said, pouring two large gin and tonics. "Just want to warm up a little." She smiled and it convinced him. When she was just numb enough, she guided him to the bed.



5.

Even though she had gone outside he could still smell her, on his hands, in the sheets, in the air. He breathed in deep and smiled. His eyes closed and he tried to feel her skin on his again. This was it, he thought. She's it.

He glanced over at her standing on the balcony. His eyes traced the outline of her body which was visible in a shadow through her sheer robe. He never could have imagined how good it would be. He tried, nightly. But nothing even came close to this.

He'd planned to wait for her to come back to bed but the mixture of alcohol and exhaustion was too powerful. He fell into a pleasant, satisfied sleep and when he woke she was gone.

6.

An email in appeared her inbox.

*I don't understand. I thought we had a good time...*

*What happened to you?*

Delete.

## **WHAT THE MOUNTAINS WILL HAVE**

---

**Ian Roberts**

Nearing the peak of a mammoth mountain, barely visible behind a veil of wispy clouds I look back and cannot clearly see where I started. The haze of the air and the frozen water droplets that form the playful clouds blur my vision.

I was born in the valley of two bountiful mountains. In my formative years I remember looking, never imagining that I would someday climb to where the sun was swallowed by the mountain each night. My mother and father climbed one of their own just like their parents before them and I know I am destined for my own. Years pass and I find myself yearning to scale its slippery slope, to see the other side illuminated by the setting sun and to be closer to where the stars seem to multiply from one point high above the peak each night. One day I decide to pack my things, everything that I thought would be handy for this little adventure, and set off. I can't wait to be above the noise and confusion of adolescence. Barely making it into the foothills, I hit a fork in the trail. I choose the path that seems well trodden. I encounter setbacks and come to the conclusion that the path I chose turns out to be the wrong trail for me. Setbacks, knowledge of how inadequate my pack is, and hard earned wisdom are my reward. I did manage to make a friend along the way. My new companion, who goes by the name of Lopsang Sherpa, knows about these treacherous crags. Lopsang was born to a similar valley with twin peaks. We trudge our way up; stepping, dragging, sloshing, laboring, being careful not to climb too high too fast and run the risk of burning out. Climbing is like a game of chess every step must be calculated and the route must not be too precarious.

Few get more than one chance at this climb, care must be taken.

My sherpa and I reach what we think is the top. The view from the top is not at all what I thought it would be. Night falls and we must stop. Another snag develops when we let our guards down, this time it is completely out of my hands. Lopsang waits anxiously as I walk a fine line between life and death. Altitude sickness struck me in the night without notice. Helpless, stuck on the mountain, I was too weak to descend and Lopsang decided it was too risky to chance carrying me down alone. Two weeks of agony, my gut rotting, struggling to stay optimistic, and not knowing what would happen. After about a month of rehab on the mountain, I was on my feet again. I opened my eyes wide, for the first time in a long time. This isn't the top that I imagined when I was young. A false peak, the top was obscured by clouds. Wispy mare's hair that striates the sky revealing fleeting glimpses of the knife like ridge that runs the length of the peak.

Human ambitions are useless if the mountain will not have it. We must wait for a weather window to continue are assault on the slopes. Lopsang rattled from the previous situation, straps a lifeline on my climbing harness. "We are in this together," Lopsang proclaims. This thin band of nylon, the only thing that binds us should arrest a fall, in theory. The lifeline is not fool proof we still have to lookout for each other, one slip and nonchalance might pull both of us off the mountain.

Every step is harder than the one before. Two steps forward and one step back, but progress is being made. The wind seems to be in our face at every turn. Fighting for every inch, the wind is savage, piercing, unfair. The wind tries to devour my aspirations, but I know I can go on. Finally nearing the ridgeline, Lopsang and I stop at an outlook. Looking back at the way we came remembering the missteps

and great strides, laughing ourselves into breathlessness in the thin air. We build camp, a rag-tag setup, it only needs to last a little longer. The tragic yellow tent, not much to look at, but it doesn't leak when the weather is fair. The tent is like a beacon dotting its way up the craggy slope. Friends coming and going, staying for short periods, they have their own mountains to climb.

Underneath the starry sky, my eyes grow heavy. A couple of logs for the fire should keep it up till morning. "I'm calling it a night" I sleepily say. Hard work is surely the best sleeping pill. That night I slept like one of the logs that I tossed on the fire.

I had a vivid dream that night. In this dream, I reached the top that I have been struggling for so long to claim. My legs straddle the sharp ridge, walking and maintaining my balance on the fine edge. The peak is expansive its edge seems to fade into the horizon, I'm going to enjoy it as long as I can. Lopsang and I share the lead enjoying our feat together. This is our mountain, together we plant the flag, a symbol culminating every step and misstep it took to get here. The path we blazed is our own, no one takes the same one, and you have to forge one for yourself.

You can't stay on top forever, the mountain only lets you stay as long as it sees fit. Like the path up you have to find a way down. Different muscles are used for the descent, your knees take a pounding, and if you do it right you sweat less than the way up. There's a place to the south where we could rest and warm our tired bones. This place is only a pit stop on our way to the final destination, a valley by the name of Death.

## ***MAN ON THE END***

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**Tracy Ulrich**

Man on the end sleeps Sunday away  
Don't know his name  
Watch him come and go sometimes looks old  
Learn he has no bed television or phone  
Everyone deserves a bed but have you seen  
His head  
And that smell  
Learn he drinks and has no family  
Job supports him and shelter to cover him  
I'm sad for him, won't leave my mind.  
Neighbor dies and leaves a bed  
Hallway it lies until we decide  
Pull tug and get there  
To the man on the end who has no bed  
No one wants to be charity case  
Words thought long and hard by a card  
This is for you, mgmt.

## ***GET OUT OF HERE***

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**Tracy Ulrich**

Today is the day I leave unfortunately  
It's raining and my leg hurts listening  
To NPR, waiting for the pain  
To subside the news is sad-drought in  
The Southwest for the fifth year straight  
The Middle East is out of control. I  
Seldom listen for it always seems so  
Sad now Liberia is becoming unsafe  
For Americans-many people have died.  
We are saving the Red Cross and other  
Unitarians-personally I wish  
We would focus on the U.S. and let  
Others kill themselves if that's what  
They want but I'm ignorant of the news  
Rain is light, easy enough to break camp accept  
My leg hope the meds take affect  
And soon yes, this is my time of  
Frustration at home I'd be watching  
TV or reading a good book but today  
I have to move around, be active and get  
Out of here like the Middle East  
I figure one hour then a nice  
Hot shower should make me feel better  
But can't count on it-Then I have to drive  
Four hours the pain will continue unless  
This station could help the pain go away  
Completely with the weather change  
I don't feel hopeful.  
The people who think I can work if  
I can travel at this point  
Just piss me off.



## ***MORNING THOUGHT***

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**Tracy Ulrich**

Missing family was my first morning thought  
Until my first cup of coffee was bought  
What the hell was that thought  
My morning dreams had caught

## ***SITTING THERE STARING***

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**Tracy Ulrich**

Sitting there staring  
At me and at the world  
I know she is waiting  
Waiting for her mate  
She knows he will be there

She has never looked at me  
That way, I was  
Fascinated by her stare  
And her bright red beak

## ***BEAUTIFUL FLIGHT***

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**Tracy Ulrich**

Walking along enjoying the rainy day  
Together all is well with the world until  
Bush shaking on the ground flapping  
Wings of blue startled by presence scared  
Flap flap leaning down afraid  
Lying still breathing hard  
Both united as one animal cares for the other  
Gently grabbing the body behind the wings  
Away from biting beak pounding pulse  
Heart calmed with blue jay in hand  
Wire around his neck  
Removed to watch his beautiful flight














## Contributors:

David Wyman  
Hannah Peckham  
Ashley Gough  
Ayanna A. Powell  
Meghan Hume  
Blaise Collins  
Michael Weston Mercier  
Joseph Benavidez  
Luis Orosco  
Heidi Surette-Narcisse

Kao Sheng Moua  
Joseph Benavidez  
Rachel Jessica Gallo  
Nick Rudomin  
Ian Roberts  
Laurie Beland  
Sean Ryder  
Tracy Ulrich  
Marcia Hill